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GOING GAGA: POP FANDOM AS ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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GOING GAGA: POP FANDOM AS ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

GOING GAGA: POP FANDOM AS ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Among various fan sites dedicated to pop stars, GagaDaily is one prominent online collective that centers around Lady Gaga. This study is a piece of ethnographic research focused on two claims – GagaDaily constitutes a Community of Practice (Eckert, 2006) in an online setting, and the regular use of humor by users fulfills social and pragmatic roles in the discourse. Communicative phenomena (both textual and graphic) that characterize the linguistic repertoire of GagaDaily members were catalogued from the first 100 pages of one thread within the forums. These data were grouped into categories corresponding to different dimensions of language use as well as media/literary devices. Alongside a quantitative analysis of various tokens and types of data, a qualitative examination of selected excerpts from the sample confirm the veracity of the two main claims. When analyzed with regard to Wenger's definition of a Community of Practice (Wenger, 2009), GagaDaily meets all three of his requirements. Likewise, the analysis of humor reveal that GagaDaily users regularly engage in the first dichotomy of the *tactics of intersubjectivity,* adequation and distinction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004) and incorporate GIF images in their humor to express their alignment with stance objects (DuBois, 2007) and other members.

KEYWORDS: Online Communities, Fandom, Humor, Ethnography, Communication

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_____4/27/2018_____

GOING GAGA: POP FANDOM AS ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

"It is so intense to be a super fan. I feel that it's been lost a little bit. If anything, I want to create that again," said Lady Gaga during one of her earliest televised interviews (Rosado, 2015). After nearly a decade in the spotlight, the pop icon continues to execute that same prophetic goal, amassing fan after fan, a great number of whom are part of the LGBTQ community. Nearly every major pop icon in recent history, especially within music, has had a passionate fan base; images of teenage girls losing their minds over Elvis or The Beatles are not hard to find. Yet while person-to-person contact has not disappeared in the world of fandom, another medium has taken hold in this millennium - discussion boards, also known as forums. One such forum, GagaDaily, serves as the virtual space in which thousands of Gaga fans congregate to discuss their pop queen. In doing so, they make use of a characteristic linguistic repertoire, with a variety of indexical ties, as well as non-linguistic communicative phenomena that help build and reify the culture of the forums.

In order to further understand this online culture, I have crafted an ethnography of the virtual community with a few overarching questions in mind. First, I want to investigate to what extent GagaDaily could be called a "community of practice," and how this relates to the linguistic phenomena observed on the forums (Wenger, 2009, p. 1). Second, I will explore the role that humor plays in shaping and maintaining the culture of these specific forums by means of one dichotomous *tactic of intersubjectivity* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 382), the concept of the stance triangle (DuBois, 2007, p. 162) as well as the role of humor as part of the "practice" of a community of practice. Using these

questions, I have organized this ethnography into the following sections: Background information (on both Gaga, GagaDaily, and the role of ethnography), methods of data collection and analysis, review of community–related literature, assessment of GagaDaily as a community of practice, overview of literature related to the second claim, assessment of humor on GagaDaily, discussion/implications, suggestions for further research, and a conclusion. Through a combination of data analysis and examination of the literature, I posit that numerous insights can be gained, including a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms of social groups (specifically communities of practice) as seen through language use.

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Born Stefani Germanotta, the superstar Lady Gaga exploded onto the pop music scene in late 2008 with her debut album *The Fame* (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013, pp. 360). According to her biography on her Facebook page, the singer has earned countless honors, from Grammy Awards to MTV Video Music Awards to multi-platinum albums and singles (Lady Gaga). As of this writing, the musician is followed by roughly 78.3 million accounts on her Twitter page (http://twitter.com/ladygaga), thus showing her widespread popularity. Unlike many pop stars – who often rely on sex appeal as a means of gathering audiences - Gaga's brand is more focused on celebrating uniqueness, equality, and self-acceptance (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013, pp. 361). Her dedication to embracing one's identity was further solidified in the number one hit, "Born This Way," which states, "I'm beautiful in my way 'cause God makes no mistakes" (Germanotta &

Laursen, 2011). Although she has undoubtedly become a household name over the years, she has managed to cultivate a rather passionate following of more invested fans; indeed, these "Little Monsters" (a name Gaga herself chose to bestow upon her most devoted fans) have been crucial to maintaining her relevance in the pop music world.

In addition to the connection that each fan shares with the singer, other relationships exist *among* the fans themselves, particularly in the online realm. There are a few different Gaga-centered discussion boards on the internet, but I have chosen to work with one of the more prominent ones, GagaDaily. Although the total number of members is not available to the public, we can gauge the popularity of this fan site through its accompanying Facebook page, which is liked by about 216,000 people (Lady Gaga Daily). Because there is no cost to join, anyone is free to become a member, provided the site is not blocked in their nation. Despite claiming members from all over the globe, discussions are held strictly in English. In some instances, a native English speaker can tell when a member has used an ungrammatical form, but, for the most part, the members are quite adept at communicating in English. Gaga herself has mentioned this forum as a place she can visit to "see what [her] fans are saying" (Lady Gaga Daily). Like most discussion boards, this forum is organized hierarchically into subforums focused on more specific topics. Some examples include "news," "charts/sales," and "Gaga thoughts." A few subforums, namely the "community center" and "general conversation," are only accessible with a membership; however, the majority of the boards are open to whomever decides to visit this corner of the internet. Within each subforum, users start their own topics of discussion (often called "threads") which then receive replies. Members have the ability to quote a previous post and respond to it in a

more specific manner. Posts may include various outside media, such as music, videos, GIF images and still images, and there is an inventory of emoticons available, many of which are of Gaga or other pop icons, especially Britney Spears and Demi Lovato.

In order to describe my role as ethnographer, I must first explain the degree to which I have participated in these forums. While I do have an account, and I have posted in the past, I prefer instead to observe. Sometimes, this behavior is known as "lurking," and, despite the negative connotations, it simply means to read without personally posting. This puts me at a fantastic vantage point for this ethnography because I have experiential knowledge of the culture of GagaDaily, but I have not compromised any data by actively participating in the thread that will later be examined. In other words, I can rightly claim to be an authority on the culture of the forums by straddling the line between member and outsider. It is necessary to reiterate that the majority of the forum is open to the public for viewing, which means that, in addition to *members* who may lurk in certain threads, there could be countless non-members who observe (and obviously do not have the ability to post). We can only assume that members who post are aware of this fact, although it is nearly impossible to assess the degree to which they even *care*. In a sense, this may help to mitigate whatever effect I may cause by virtue of being an observer. I am simply one of many "lurkers;" the only difference is that I am taking notes, and that I am looking at the content instead of the individual members.

The role of a lurker is thus similar to, but not exactly the same as, that of a participant observer. Garcia et al. (2009, p. 58) state that there are a wide range of scholarly views on the value of lurking. Bell argues that lurking is a one-way process, and is thus inferior to a true participant observation" (Bell, 2001, p. 198). In order to

present a middle-ground, Garcia et al. elaborate on the concept of a participant experiencer:

> The use of the term "experiencer" instead of observer is helpful because in the online support group there is no opportunity to directly observe the other members of the group; the researcher can, however, experience what it is like to participate in the group by reading and posting messages to the group. (Garcia et al., 2009, p. 58)

Having posted in the past, and having lurked for many years, my role could be more specifically described as a participant experiencer. Furthermore, because my research is more concerned with user-to-user interaction (as opposed to user-to-ethnographer), there is little *need* for the dialogue that Bell champions (Bell, 2001, p. 198).

As I have stated, it is quite likely that the members of GagaDaily simply do not care that outsiders can read their posts. Suler lists numerous intersecting factors that reduce the inhibition of those who participate in online communication: "dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of authority" (Suler, 2004, pp. 321). Dissociative anonymity is pretty straightforward; if the person wants to be anonymous online, it is very doable and common. Invisibility affects inhibition by removing the face-to-face aspect from communication. Asynchronicity refers to the sporadic and arbitrary timing of replies; one is not obligated to respond immediately. Solipsistic introjection occurs when a user, having little insight into the physical existence of their online interlocutor, creates a "character" of sorts from the online interactions; this factor asserts that self-boundaries

are altered and the user may fill in or characterize the other person in ways that reflect the user (Suler, 2004, pp. 323). Likewise, dissociative imagination refers to the strong demarcation that online users make between their virtual world and physical existences. Finally, with the exception of forum moderators and administrators, there is very little sense of authority in online interactions.

Being an online forum, GagaDaily can foster, to varying degrees, all of these factors. Members may choose their level of anonymity, whether they show their face, when they post, how they conceive of other users, how they conceive of the digital environment, and whether they accept any concept of authority. In other words, GagaDaily inherently allows for online disinhibition. Because of this, I argue that the members, with their lack of inhibitions, care very little what observers may think of their content. Therefore, while there must inevitably be an observer (myself), the possibility and presence of one is not as likely to fundamentally change the discourse. Likewise, the things they post may not necessarily be a reflection of their "true selves," but, as Suler claims, part of a constellation of "selves" (Suler, 2004, pp. 321). Considering the simultaneous awareness of and apathy towards potential outside observers (lurkers), the dilemma of the observer's paradox is weakened in this instance.

Therefore, as the participant experiencer, I have sought to record the uses of language that I have recognized as characteristic to these forums. In addition to the qualitative examination of the authentic posts by these users, I also chose to provide quantitative data to illustrate to complement the text. In what follows, I describe my data collection methods as well as justification for the use of intuition in judging what examples would even be considered "data" in the first place.

SECTION 3: METHODS

The data collection process involved reading through a single thread (also known as *topic*) on GagaDaily. For my analysis, I chose a thread dedicated to analyzing the music charts from around the world. This specific thread - "Chart Discussion: The Cure/Joanne" - had been closed at the time of collection, meaning it was impossible to add new posts [1]. The thread was started on March 25th, 2017, and, like many charts threads, it did not take very long to break the aforementioned milestone; it was closed on April 19th, 2017, on page 1085. During this time frame, Lady Gaga's single "Million Reasons" had peaked on the charts and was beginning its descent, the commercial effects of her Super Bowl Halftime performance were waning, and fans were anxiously awaiting the announcement of the next single.

This thread is optimal for my data collection for a number of reasons. First, as any member of the forums could attest, the charts thread is always an entity unto itself, with regular members who post and analyze chart data together. In other words, it already could be characterized as a community within a community, a microcosm of the forums at large. Second, it is an extremely active thread, which allows for a somewhat more synchronous view of the forums. The specific thread I used crossed 100 pages in about two weeks, and my data set (the first 100 pages) only lasted 6 days. Therefore, while the interactions may not be instantaneous, as in face-to-face communication, they are less asynchronous than other threads within other subforums. This is desirable because it more closely mimics real conversation while still existing in the virtual and (principally)

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[1] This tends to happen every time a thread breaks one thousand pages.

textual environment. Finally, it is accessible to the public at large, meaning that no membership is necessary in order to see what GagaDaily's chart fanatics are saying. Assuming nothing catastrophic occurs to GagaDaily's servers, the forums will remain up indefinitely; this means that, in addition to the samples and screenshots that I will provide, the actual raw data is still viewable. Alternative interpretations are thus possible and even encouraged, considering the unique nature of this ethnography.

Truthfully, the process of working out a methodology began years ago when I first started enjoying this online community. Through unconscious acquisition of the many linguistic phenomena, I gained a fair degree of communicative competence in this cyberlect. In other words, when finally deciding to do this study, I already understood how language was used in this community, even if I had to brainstorm to remember all of the different ways. In doing so, however, I developed a list of *a priori* categories and subcategories by which I sought to organize all of the phenomena. Therefore, when I would eventually start sifting through the data, I would be able to categorize all the phenomena which would allow for easier analysis much later in the process. The first set of categories correspond to different dimensions of linguistic analysis - the different levels of language: Phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon/semantics. Considering how broad each of these dimensions are, I subdivided them into more specific names of the linguistic phenomena observed, using the dimension as a sort of overarching category. Phonetics/Phonology only had one subcategory – Implied Pronunciation. Morphology was divided into Acronyms, Neologisms, and Portmanteau.

Syntax only had one subcategory, as well – phrase structure. Finally, Lexical/Semantic was broken into Endemic Terms and Fixed Phrases.[2]

Despite how useful these categories proved to be, there were instance that did not fall neatly into the above demarcations, or it was clear that they could better be explained from an interdisciplinary approach. In describing Multimodal Discourse Analysis, O'Halloran asserts that even greater insight can be gained by analyzing the purely linguistic data *with* the non-linguistic data, thus showing the interplay between language and the other communicative resources surrounding its use (O'Halloran, 2011, pp. 120-121). Therefore, I turned to other fields of study to generate a more complete list of language phenomena. First, I added hyperbole and allusion which were grouped into a family titled "Literary Devices." Then, moving into media studies, I grouped various forms of media (pictures, no-text gifs, text gifs, embedded videos, embedded music, etc) into a family I appropriately dubbed "Media." Through engagement with other disciplines, I was able to more accurately capture *all* of the instances of language use.

It is worth noting that these dimensions of language use do not necessarily operate independently of each other. In fact, several phenomena that were catalogued as one type could also have been placed in another – usually, this "other" type was allusion. To make things as simple as possible, while allusion permeates nearly all the following discussion, any *numerical* record of it refers to those entries that contain allusion *and* do not neatly fit into another category. In other words, if the user simply employed an effective (or ineffective) reference to some outside concept or media, without some other type of language play, it was recorded as an allusion. I have chosen to work with allusion as

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[2] While a *Phrase Structure* allows for the insertion of the appropriate phrase type into the structure, a *Fixed Phrase* is invariable.

opposed to indexicality because the allusion does not refer to signs that point to states of affairs. Rather, they point to cultural knowledge as a means of understanding a given utterance or series of utterances. Furthermore, indexicality is far more suited to identity discussions, which is beyond the scope of this work. Despite this tight restriction, that category held a fair share of entries.

To begin, I opened the thread at page one and began reading the posts and looking for linguistic phenomena that met the following requirements: it was mainly characteristic of *this online community* and/or it was used for humor in general. These two categorizations serve my claims well because they feed directly into each one (community *and* humor) while acknowledging that the two are interconnected at times. This is especially helpful during my final analysis in which I assert that humor constitutes part of the practice of the community.

Before going any further, I want to be clear on my role as the data collector, and I want to be transparent about the potential sources of error or bias. Being a lurker, I have a certain degree of intuition as to what meets the requirements listed above. My years of experience with these forums does privilege me with a certain level of insight; I am far more likely to "get the joke" than an outsider. That being said, the use of intuition is always a source of potential problems in social science research. First of all, it is not impossible that I simply missed something interesting or that I miscounted. Likewise, because I *know* that humorous language use exists on these forums, I could potentially read too much into a certain linguistic phenomenon - a certain word or phrase, for instance, may not be as profound as my intuition tells me because I *want* to find jokes. Because of this, if I was not absolutely sure as to whether a phenomenon was appropriate,

it was not recorded. Thus, any errors are more than likely due to underreporting, and it is likely that the number of linguistic phenomena is actually higher than what I declare. It is imperative that we keep these considerations in mind; I do not wish to undermine my conclusions, but I also do not want to make conclusions that are not there.

With the above requirements in mind, I began recording all the phenomena I found according to the following: Type of phenomenon, Type Family, Page Number/Frequency, Exact Text (if applicable), descriptions, relevant context, and additional category (if applicable). The first two act as a tagging mechanism and allow for easier counting of the different phenomena. If a certain linguistic phenomenon occurs numerous times in the thread, I simply marked its frequency, but for more unique, one-of-a-kind phenomena, I marked the page on which it was found. If there was text, I copied it exactly as it was in the post. I then gave my description of what the phenomenon meant or how it functioned; after this, I provided any necessary contextual information, for example, whether the phenomenon in question was in response to an earlier post by a different member. Finally, I made room for an additional categorical placement to be made, since numerous examples were also pop culture allusions. At the end of every page, I then re-read the page to ensure that I had not missed anything of interest. This process was repeated 99 times; thus, the first 100 pages of this Charts thread were catalogued in a spreadsheet. Because each page contained 15 posts each, I ended up with 1500 posts in total.

To begin, we will look at the first claim – GagaDaily constitutes a community of practice. The following section examines literature related to communities of practice, especially in the online setting. Afterwards, I will prove, piece by piece, how GagaDaily

neatly fits this categorization using the data that I collected with the methods previously described.

SECTION 4: COMMUNITIES IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

The notion of a community, despite being nearly omnipresent in the human experience, is quite difficult to define, except in the most general terms. According to the Oxford English Dictionary Online, a community is "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common" (Community). With such a broad-stroke definition, numerous groups can be classified into communities; furthermore, with the rise of the internet, the necessity of "living in the same place" is not as valid. I argue that while GagaDaily shows meaningful characteristics of several types of communities, there is one category that best describes the forums – a community of practice.

One concept predates the community of practice – a speech community. In describing and analyzing Labov's work, Morgan noted that it emphasized the relationship between linguistic variation and traditional sociological categories, such as race, class, and gender (Morgan, 2003, p. 9). Morgan states that

> Speech communities reflect what people do and know when they interact with one another. It assumes that when people come together through discursive practices, they intend to behave as though they operate within a shared set of norms, local knowledge, beliefs, and values. It means that they are aware of these things and capable of knowing when they are being adhered to and when the values of the community are being ignored. (Morgan, 2003, p. 13)

Through this description, we see how the discursive landscape allows for greater sociological concepts to play out - namely adherence to and deviance from shared norms/values. These are crucial for discussing aggregates as large as entire cultures or as small as a friend group; language, being the primary mode of communication, is an important dimension in which social norms are obeyed or ignored. However, in understanding the social atmosphere present on GagaDaily, other modes, such as images, GIFs, and emoticons work *with* language to allow the member to participate effectively, drawing on their communicative competence within this online setting.

The framework of a speech community, in many ways, does adequately reflect the social environment of GagaDaily. There are shared linguistic resources, there are norms and values, and there is pretty regular communication, especially in the Charts thread(s). However fitting this categorization may be, it leaves out the main focus of the entire website: Lady Gaga. With the exception of the "community center" and the "conversation area," the topic of discussion, in some way or another, will inevitably come back to Lady Gaga. Therefore, we need a theoretical framework that addresses topics of interest as they relate to some group's culture. In addition to that necessity, the sociological emphasis on such abstract concepts as race, class, gender, etc. are not very helpful in describing these members. Because users are anonymous, unless one reveals any of this information, it is largely kept secret, and thus, it is impossible to find such information without asking for it. Considering we are unable to ascertain these sociological variables within the context of this project, it is unhelpful to attempt to connect linguistic variation with them.

However, sociological variables must be discussed insofar as they lay the groundwork within which the culture can develop, leading to assumptions about the members and indexical ties surrounding their language use. Lady Gaga, being an outspoken LGBTQ rights advocate, is fittingly a gay icon. Much like linguistic indices, one's music tastes, even when stated without context, will allow for others to make assumptions about the listener. In our case, those who identify as male and enjoy Lady Gaga's music are often stereotyped as gay. No study has been done to assess the sexual demographics of her fan base, so it is impossible to state whether this stereotype is true. However, regardless of the members' gender identities or sexual orientations, a decent portion of their language use is often associated with gay men. By posting on a Lady Gaga fan site, assumptions are made about the members' sexual orientations and/or gender identities, often times made by one member about another. I assert that while we should not attempt to tie the linguistic phenomena present on the forums *specifically and solely* to gay culture, we simply cannot deny the impact that gay culture has had on the language use of the forums and vice versa.

In order to better represent the community at hand, we can turn to other understandings of communities within the social sciences, namely communities of practice. Eckert says that a community of practice "is a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavor" (Eckert, 2006, p. 683). She later lists the advantage to conceiving such groups of people in this way:

The value of the notion communities of practice to Sociolinguistics and Linguistic

Anthropology lies in the fact that it identifies a social grouping not in virtue of

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shared abstract characteristics (e.g. class, gender) or simple co-presence (e.g.

neighborhood, workplace), but in virtue of shared practice. (Eckert, 2006, p. 683)

According to Eckert, "In the course of regular joint activity, a community of practice

develops ways of doing things, views, values, power relations, ways of talking" (Eckert,

2006, p. 683). One of the developers of the theory, Etienne Wenger, enumerates three

essential aspects of a community of practice: the domain, the community, and the

practice (Wenger, 2009, p. 1). The domain refers to the shared interest or purpose that

draws the members of the community into communication with one another (Wenger,

2009, p. 1). In addition, the community is more than just a collection of people; members

of the community "engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share

information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other"

(Wenger, 2009, p. 1). Finally, Wenger states that members of the community, "develop a

shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring

problems—in short a shared practice" (Wenger, 2009, p. 1-2). While not abandoning the

concept of a speech community, we will find the "community of practice" to be a far

more useful framework for our goals because it does not focus on the broad sociological

categories of before, yet instead unifies the members of a group by means of shared

practice. We will instead focus more on Eckert's definition and Wenger's three factors,

which I will argue do apply to GagaDaily.

There is one obvious issue that I have yet to address: the fact that this community

exists online. Fortunately, the concept of an online community of practice is quite

tenable, of course recognizing that there will be some differences. Within his in-depth

discussion of virtual communities of practice, Johnson enumerates ways in which such a

community can come into being. First, the potential group needs a purpose and a place in which it can exist (Johnson, 2001, p. 51). In our case, the World Wide Web functions as the place, and the purpose, in its broadest sense, is to discuss Lady Gaga. Second, "the participants in the group should promote leadership from within the group, as well as define norms or a code of conduct" (Johnson, 2001, p. 51). The forums have an entire team of moderators, administrators, and community coordinators, who function as *de jure* leadership within GagaDaily. Furthermore, there *is* a list of community guidelines as well as forum rules. These aspects of GagaDaily, though, are not the object of our interest; instead, I will show how there is *de facto* leadership at least in one prominent thread, and I will show the various norms (linguistic and/or communicative) that have arisen in the culture of the forums. While aspects of speech communities may certainly apply to GagaDaily, a more apt understanding would be as a community of practice, complete with a linguistically-rich group culture. During the results/assessment section of this ethnography, I will address the validity of this first claim, drawing upon data from the forums themselves.

SECTION 5: THE ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

According to Wenger, the first key element of a Community of Practice is the *domain* - the topic of interest that is shared among the members (Wenger, 2009, p. 1). Within GagaDaily, there is one overarching domain and a few of what I call "sub-domains": points of interest that in some way relate to the overarching domain. Obviously, the overarching domain is Lady Gaga. With the exception of a few "general" subforums, the rest of the forums are dedicated to Lady Gaga only; regularly going "OT"

(off-topic) can lead to warning points, a quantified representation of a user's reprimands from a moderator. The sub-domains are also quite obvious - they correlate with each of the more focused, Gaga-related subforums. Figure 1 shows the homepage of the forums from the perspective of a guest - someone who does not have an account.
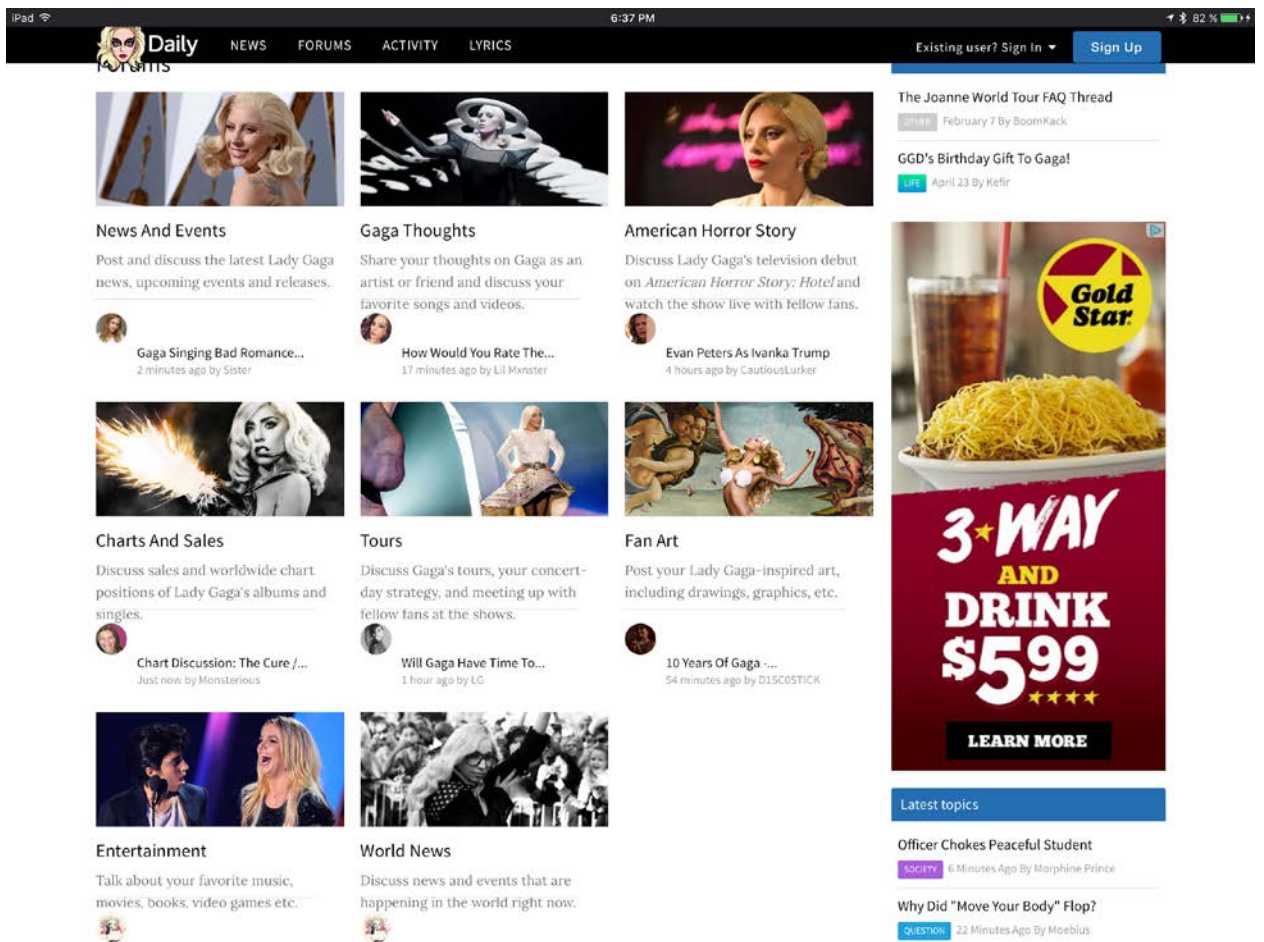
Figure 1, GagaDaily homepage.

The first six subforums are all related to Lady Gaga in some way, although this may not be clear for one of them. The "American Horror Story" sub-forum was created because Lady Gaga held a starring role in the 5th season of said show, portraying an eternally broken-hearted vampire known as "The Countess." The "Gaga Thoughts" sub-forum functions as a miscellaneous section for anything vaguely related to Lady Gaga or her

career. As I stated in my methods section, though, I am mostly interested in a certain closed thread within the "Charts/Sales" sub-forum, a place where the numbers are crunched and the discussions get heated.

Second, GagaDaily most certainly contains the community element of a Community of Practice. Wenger mentions four important characteristics of community that emerge in pursuing the domain: the members help each other, they share information, they participate in joint activities/discussions, and relationships form (Wenger, 2009, p. 1). In the case of GagaDaily, the primary way members help each other is *through* sharing information, notably in the "News" section and the "Charts/Sales" section. I have attached screenshots of these two subforums (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2, News and Events Subforum.

Figure 3, Charts and Sales subforum.

Within the "News" section, all of the threads are predictably reporting new events related to Lady Gaga, no matter how insignificant. Lady Gaga's stats (usually record sales, YouTube views, and chart positions) are reported primarily in the always-active Charts thread, although some members like to start separate threads for important milestones or information they feel is important, such as a remarkable sales update or platinum certification of a track/album.

Another criterion for community is the participation in joint activities/discussions. It is clearly met because GagaDaily is an online forum where (presumably) productive discussions are taking place. The best example of this is, of course, the Charts thread,

where members discuss the Charts, plan "streaming parties" for her singles, post radio data, provide links to make radio *requests*, and calculate and predict chart positions, among other things. For example, on page 9 of the thread I catalogued, a user named Gypsy Life says, "All songs above MR on HAC are peaking. Also should be #8 tomorrow." The user is predicting that, because the songs above MR ("Million Reasons") are starting to fall on the HAC (Hot Adult Contemporary) radio chart, "Million Reasons" can rise to number 8 on said chart. Many posts are like this, as predicting and making sideline judgments about how to manage Gaga's career are common on this thread.

The final criterion requires that relationships form among the users. Given the online nature of the forums, I believe that this criterion can only be met to an extent. These users are mostly anonymous, and, while it is not impossible for people to make new friends on GagaDaily, it is reasonable to call into question how strong the bonds can truly be if people do not meet face-to-face. Regardless, there is some evidence that relationships can form, albeit in a moderately superficial fashion. First, the quote feature of the site allows users to directly reference the content of a previous post. This allows for somewhat more personal communication between two members as opposed to addressing the group as a whole. Users employ this constantly, and it could be considered analogous to turn-taking in spoken conversation. Second, the private message feature of the site allows members to communicate with each other away from the threads, and other users may not view said conversations. I do not have data on the exact number of time this function is used, but its continued existence suggests that it is at least used somewhat. Finally, the very existence of humor on the forums, though it may not build lifelong friendships, does create a funny atmosphere and helps build a sense of

camaraderie or levity. Having shown that these criteria are met, we can safely say that

GagaDaily has the community element.

Finally, I will prove the existence of the "practice" aspect. This refers to shared

ways of doing things, norms, and *ways of talking*. This element focuses on *how* things are

done within the community. Because the previously mentioned joint

activities/discussions are done *through* communication, the focus will obviously be on

language use.[3] Recall that I intend to categorize humor as an element of the *practice* of

this community. Despite occurring frequently, this aspect is not the only form of practice

on GagaDaily, and so I will first discuss several prominent linguistic patterns and

phenomena that I interpolated from my data. Bear in mind that many of these examples

are humorous, or are at least meant to be, and thus there will be a degree of overlap. My

goal at the present is to be as comprehensive as possible in reporting the salient linguistic

phenomena on this forum. I have attached graphics (Figure 4) of the quantitative data.

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[3] This does not conflate "community of practice" with "speech community" because of the existence of a
Domain around which the activities and discussions are focused. Likewise the very existence of group
activities and its role in the Community element help to rule out the "speech community" characterization.

Family	Instances
P/P	4
Morph	480
Syntax	5
L/S	280
L/D	42
Media	232
Total	1043
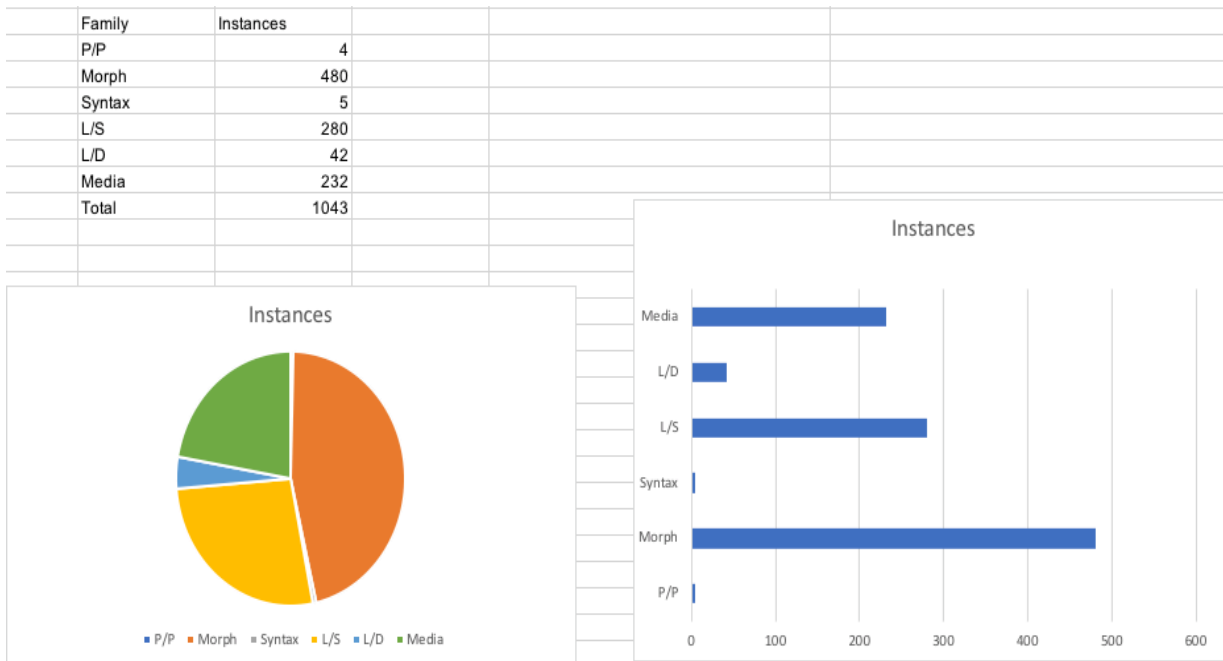
Figure 4, Data Illustrations.

As expected, some of the *a priori* categories were more popular than the others. Given that this is an online, primarily textual setting, it stands to reason that there is a paucity of "phonetics/phonology" examples. Surprisingly, though, there are relatively few "syntax" examples as well. The "Morphology" and "Lexical/Semantic" families, however, provided numerous examples of relevant linguistic phenomena. Outside of linguistics, I had a family for "literary devices" as well as "media," and they saw great representation throughout the data as well. In order to demonstrate how pervasive internet language use can be, I will discuss all of the categories I created, starting with phonetics/phonology.

Within this linguistic dimension, there were four different *types* of language phenomena that occurred in the data, some of which were used more than once. All of these phonetics/phonology phenomena emerged as what I call "implied pronunciation" – something unique about the orthography *implies* a certain type of surface form which

may be slightly different from the standard. The most common example of this, with eleven examples, was "yas" (and all closely related spellings). It is intended to be read as [jã:s]. The most common alternative spellings of this term typically had a longer string of the letter "a," which is understood phonetically as lengthening the vowel. This sort of vowel lengthening also occurs on page 41 of the Charts Thread itself in an allusion to Lady Gaga's song "A-Yo." The track opens with the singer happily shouting "Here we go!" In order to replicate her elongation of the [i] vowel in "here" that Gaga employs, the user wrote a large string of the letter "e." Also, in the spirit of shading Katy Perry, one user on page 51 refers to her as "Purry." This changes the [ɛ] vowel in "Perry" to a [ɚ]. Thus, in addition to replicating relative vowel length, users are able to alter the vowel quality by adjusting the graphemes. On one level, this is a reference the onomatopoeia "purr" – a noise commonly attributed to cats (Katy Perry affectionately refers to her super fans as Katy Kats). Likewise, it falls in line with the general trend of not referring to Katy Perry by her stage name, but numerous nicknames, many of which are intended to mock her.

Perhaps the most interesting type of implied pronunciation was the use of capital "T" to indicate aspirated word-final stops. Though this only occurred twice in the data set, it is worth noting because it demonstrates that even those without formal linguistic training (that we know of) are at least somewhat aware of this phonological phenomenon. One instance of it appeared on the word "perched" which was written as "perchedT." It is possible that this heightened stop-release is employed to index a gay identity, as Eckert claims (Eckert, 2008, p. 468). On the other hand, the user may simply be attempting to replicate clarified speech. "An additional aspect of stop release is its potential to express

emphasis, which is related, but not identical, to clarity" (Eckert, 2008, p. 469) Whether the user in question is aware of these indexical ties, they are still in the indexical field for the phenomenon, and it is interesting to see how they are expressed through purely textual means.

Within "Morphology," the most relevant categories were "acronyms," "neologisms," and "portmanteaux." The first is the ubiquitous use of acronyms, usually in reference to song titles. Table 1 ranks the top 10 most used acronyms by frequency, and it provides a fully worded version of the acronym, alongside contextual information and number of uses.

Table 1, Acronym Chart

Acronym (short form)	Acronym (long form)	Contextual Information	Number of uses
MR	Million Reasons	Second single off of Gaga's album, *Joanne*	171
DIC	Dancing in Circles	Fan favorite song from *Joanne*	68
HAC	Hot Adult Contemporary	Radio format that provides older audiences with current music	63
GP	General Public	People who aren't super fans of pop stars.	21
AC	Adult Contemporary	Radio format similar to AC, but with much slower add/drop times.	20
DWUW	Do What U Want	Second single from Gaga's album *ARTPOP*	18
AI	Audience Impressions	Approximate number of people who heard a given song on a given day (in millions)	15
TTH	Today's Top Hits	Most followed playlist on the popular streaming service, Spotify	13
CTTR	Chained to the Rhythm	Lead single from Katy Perry's *Witness*, a direct competitor to Lady Gaga	9
PI	Perfect Illusion	Lead single from Gaga's *Joanne*	9

We can see that acronyms are a prevalent linguistic phenomenon, but they also facilitate the discussion of chart statistics on GagaDaily. In terms of sheer typing speed, it is almost always easier to type "DWUW" instead of "Do What U Want." Thus, most practically, the pervasive use of acronyms allows the writer and the reader to spend less time processing a song title that everyone already knows anyway; these interlocutors can instead devote more linguistic energy to other ideas. Consequently, those who are unfamiliar with these acronyms will only be able to understand the discussion at hand if they "decode" them through inference. This information is not secret, so encryption is not the purpose of using these acronyms, but they can have the unintended effect of preventing outsiders from accurately comprehending the topic. Simply put, these - and many other - acronyms make up a substantial amount of the linguistic repertoire on this fan site, thus contributing to the shared practice.

While at first, the use of acronyms may be written off as a function of writing on the internet, the pervasive use of acronyms surrounding pop stars and the music industry might be the real exception. In his study on chat discussions between students and librarians (similar to an online help desk), Maness found 0 instances of acronym usage out of over 10,000 words analyzed (Maness, 2008, p. 13). Likewise, in a study on student-to-student chats with a total of 11,718 words, Baron only found 90 instances, the vast majority of which were simply "lol" (Baron, 2004, p. 412). My analysis yielded a wide variety of acronyms, most of which were related to the topics at hand – Gaga and the music industry. Thus, the large number and high functionality of the acronyms I found are not merely a consequence of internet-mediated language use.

More sophisticated morphological alterations occur through the relatively steady uses of neologisms, many of which can be sub-classified as portmanteaux. In its simplest sense, a neologism is a newly coined word, and there are numerous ways to make such a creation. One way that appeared three times in the data involved substitution of either the first or second word within the compound noun and song title, "Million Reasons." Since Gaga's record-breaking Super Bowl Halftime Show performance, fans and media experts alike have been predicting that "Million Reasons" would receive nominations and potentially even win a Grammy or two at the upcoming 2018 ceremony (McIntyre, 2017). Because of this, fans on GagaDaily have been creating neologisms from the title "Million Reasons," analyzing "Million" as an adjective and "Reasons" as a noun. One example of these substitutions is the creation "Million Grammy's," obviously a joke on the supposed, forthcoming success of "Million Reasons" at that show. Within the first 100 pages, it was used three times. Likewise, on page 16, the song was referred to as "Stable Reasons," thus commenting on the song's stability on pop radio charts. On page 23 (and 41 and 72), a user referred to the track as "Billion Reasons," and the ever-more-hyperbolic "Trillion Reasons" appeared on page 24. Then, on page 35, users call the song "Bazillion Reasons."

Another neologism in the same vein is any substitution of the noun in the compound word "Little Monster(s)." For example, one popular neologism "source" involves substitution within the word "Monster" itself. The user (on page 6) replaced the first syllable of "Monster" with "DIC" (a reference to "Dancing in Circles") to create "Little DICster(s)" (pronounced "Dick-sters"). To provide context, the fan base was divided over what song should be picked for the upcoming third single from the album

28

Joanne. With some smaller camps, the two main factions were in favor of either "A-Yo" or "Dancing in Circles." The user who created "Little DICster" was referring to members of the latter group. On page 60, the phrase "Little Chartster" was encounter – referring to the fans who spend the most time and energy discussing the numerical aspects of Lady Gaga's fame. Finally, on 49, "DIC" is analyzed as an unbound morpheme that takes on the /ɚ/ "er" bound morpheme that denotes "one who performs or advocates for the previous morpheme." A common example would be "teacher" – one who teaches. In our example, "DICer appears – referring to a person who supports DIC as the next single choice.

A more specific form of neologism that I encountered in my cataloguing was portmanteau. Deriving from French, this linguistic term refers to a single morph said to represent two morphemes (Hartmann, 1972). In other words, a portmanteau occurs when two words are phonologically combined in a way that breaks, bends, or blurs morpheme boundaries, producing an entirely new word - "smog" ("smoke" and "fog") is a great example of this. "Hunty" - used once in the data - is another fantastic example; it is a combination of the words "honey" and "cunt," and is used as a term of address towards another poster, especially in a mildly mocking way. Another interesting portmanteau that appeared in the data is a morphological "game" involving the word "Gaga." To play this game, you remove the first "ga," and replace it with a word that represents some aspect of Lady Gaga's personality, wardrobe, or really anything, as long as it comes back to Gaga. For example, on page 16, a user was referencing Gaga's choice to wear a brown wig, calling her "BrunetteGa." On page 58, a user referenced the supposed catchiness of Gaga's song "A-yo" by calling it "Sla-Yo," incorporating the term "slay," which means

garnering massive success. The most common portmanteau in the data set was a reference to Taylor Swift and Zayn Malik's duet "I Don't Wanna Live Forever" – here referred to as "Zaylor." During roughly the last 20 pages of conversation that I catalogued, this term was used 10 times. For context, the duet was currently charting high in the United States and was considered a competitor to Gaga's current single "Million Reasons."

Within the data set, there were only three different types of syntactic phenomena, and we will focus on the two more common ones. The first occurred twice and follows the formula "[NP1] (her *or* ha) [NP2]." For context, "ha" is an r-less version of the possessive "her." NP2 is some attribute that NP1 has, and both NPs can be animate or inanimate, which can potentially lead to personification. This occurred in one example on page 28, in which the user wrote "MR ha power." MR ("Million Reasons"), thus, has the attribute – "power." Note that, in this instance, a song title is modified with a female possessive adjective – "ha." The second type also occurred twice and follows the formula "[NP] says hi" where the NP can be animate or inanimate, again allowing for personification. This type of sentence-level wordplay occurs to remind a previous user of a notable exception or counterargument to something they have said. For example, on page 54, in a rather hyperbolic statement, a user states, "Everything that comes from the chainsmokers is bad," to which a second user says, "Roses says hi." The second user is thus using this special phrase structure to tell the first that "Roses" is clearly not a bad song by The Chainsmokers. As seen through the small number of examples, syntactical play was not typically employed within the data set.

If we expand our scope to the realm of words and phrases endemic to this community, we can then analyze the lexical and semantic phenomena, and how they contribute to the shared practice. At their most basic level, these "endemic terms" or "common phrases" are lexical and/or syntactical items that are found mostly on GagaDaily, especially the charts thread, and communities *like* GagaDaily (for instance, BreathHeavy, a Britney Spears fan site is likely to have a similar inventory, though not quite the same). Thus, if we were to look at the practice of being a Gaga fan as a trade or academic field, we could call this linguistic repertoire a collection of *jargon*, and, in order to most meaningfully navigate the trenches of online pop fandom, one must attain a certain degree of competence in that jargon.

With respect to charts specifically, there are a number of words and phrases, mostly taken from the music industry and various media outlets, that are well-known among the users. Typically, these metrics are studied and repeated as a means of bragging for one's favorite artist or to mock the failures of another artist. I have provided a table with some of the more prominent music industry-related terms I encountered in the data set alongside a brief explanation and the number of uses. Note that this table does not include some of the acronyms previously studied that undoubtedly relate to the music industry – AI, GP, HAC, etc.

Table 2, Music Industry Terms

Term	Explanation	Number of Uses
Spin	Number of times a song was played on the radio for one day, regardless of how many people actually heard it.	51
Peak	The highest position a song/album/artist reaches on a particular chart.	20
Flop	A commercial and/or critical failure	16
Power Rotation (PR)	The most spun songs by a single radio station for one day.	15
Smash	A commercial and/or critical success	14

Other terms, such as "payola" and "subpower (rotation)" appeared, but to a lesser extent. "Payola" refers to monetary bribery from a music label to a radio station or streaming service in order to garner more plays/promotion from the latter parties. "Subpower (rotation)" is similar to "Power Rotation," but the song is simply not spun as much as those on PR. Given the breadth of terms seen within just 100 pages of entries, it is reasonable to assume that much more jargon surrounding the music industry is familiar to these users and could be regularly employed in other threads. Thus, in any discussion about the lexical/semantic repertoire of the GagaDaily practice, we must acknowledge that a great amount of these lexical items come from the music industry at large.

The rest of the endemic terms are not as easily connected to some outside entity, such as the music industry. With indexical ties touching on numerous communities and identities, the remaining endemic terms can be considered "miscellaneous." One common

endemic term would be "[to] slay." When Gaga achieves virtually any level of success, the fans declare that she slays. A large scale takeover of iTunes after the Super Bowl is unironically declared as slaying by the fans (and probably non-fans as well), but those wishing to be humorous will deem a popular Tweet from the pop idol as "slayage." Within the first 100 pages of this thread, the term "slay" and any variations of it appear 15 times, thus showing its prevalence among these fans. Further examples of terms drawn from outside the forums would include:

- *to scream / screaming* (to laugh raucously) [8 uses]

- *to stan / stanning / a stan /* etc. (to be obsessed with a pop star) [13 uses]

- *wig / snatch one's wig /* etc. (similar to "being slayed" – overjoyed) [11 uses]

- *queen / kween* (an individual who is the best in their genre) [14 uses]

- *bop* (a generally catchy and fun song) [5 uses]

- *shook / shake / shaking* (paralyzed in awe) [9 uses]

- *Katy Kats* (Katy Perry's fan base) [8 uses]

- *Meltdown* (overreaction) [7 uses]

- *Era* (demarcation of time with respect to album/single) [9 uses]

As we can see, these terms (mostly) have referential meanings in the real world, but they take on far more specific and often humorous meanings in the pop forum context.

Another common linguistic phenomenon is the use of hyperbole, or exaggeration, in one's post. This literary device has permeated many of the previous examples, but there are still more examples that are not easily tied to the primary dimensions of linguistics. In other words, there are a number of hyperboles in the data set that exist in the conversational level of communication. One excellent example of this is the running

joke involving the strong longevity that "Million Reasons" had on the charts. Below, I have extracted hyperbolic quotes that all seem to be making fun of this:

"Ready for Million reasons 232943th revival" (Page 1)

"Million Reasons for third, fourth, and fifth single." (Page 1)

"Million Reasons as LG6" (Page 2)

"MR till death" (Page 2)

"MR its 170th wind" (Page 17)

"Waking up to the 45th rewind of Million Reasons on radio" (Page 18)

"Billion Reasons as third single!" (Page 23)

"Just like your wig when Trillion Reasons becomes the 4th single." (Page 24)

"I already see my self in 2020 and us still counting Trillion Reason's spins" (Page 25)

"Bazillion Reasons will be bigger than any popgirl's entire career." (Page 35)

"Billion reasons, heeeere we go!!" (Page 41)

"Million Reasons was, is and will stay the current single." (Page 66)

"Is Billion Reasons released as the third single yet?" (Page 72)

"Million Recharts" (Page 78)

"Million Reasons, the single that never stops selling." (Page 82)

In a similar vein, a running joke on GagaDaily that started with a tweet from Lady Gaga herself involves variations of the phrase "talent always wins." It is frequently employed (20 times within the data set) as a joke response to Gaga earning an insignificant achievement. All of these examples show that hyperbolic language is popular on GagaDaily and constitute a regular way of talking, thus, a practice.

One final phenomenon is the use of media within one's post. These media can include emoticons, pictures, embedded Tweets, YouTube videos, and even GIFs (with or without text). I have decided to focus on the two most prominent forms of media that occur in this thread – emoticons and GIFs. Furthermore, in lieu of explaining *how* they are used, I will now discuss *how often* they are used. Later in the ethnography, I will provide a more detailed description of their usage.

First of all, emoticon use was prevalent in the thread, and a few emoticons were regularly employed in the posts. Before going further, it is prudent to note that while I refer to these tiny images as emoticons (as does GagaDaily), they are not emoticons in the strictest, traditional sense given that they are not part of the defined set. I refer to them as such because that is how they are identified on the forums. Some are old, some are new. Some are generalized smiley faces, others are complete references to a famous figure. The most inclusive definition would be that they are small images that are regularly employed on the forums and provided by GagaDaily as part of the text entry function, unlike GIF images, which the user must provide from an outside source. Below, I have attached three emoticons (Figures 5-7) that were most common within the data set, followed by a quick explication of each.

Figure 5, Poot Lovato Emoticon

Figure 6, Britney Spears Emoticon.

Figure 7, "Died from Laughter" Emoticon

To start, the "Poot Lovato" emoticon (in reference to a Demi Lovato Internet meme) was used 33 times in the data. The tiny image simply shows the singer with an

awkward and uncomfortable smile. Another popular emoticon showed Britney Spears awkwardly dancing while sucking on a lollipop, and it was used 30 times. These two, and other, less-popular emoticons can be used in a variety of environments and it is often difficult to derive an objective interpretation of them that is universal among all instances. What's fascinating, then, is that they are so popular and so often used to embellish the text. One emoticon that was simple to grasp was the cartoon gravestone (10 uses), which implies that the user died from laughter. This emoticon, carrying an obvious joke with it, was not used as often as the more ambiguous previous examples. One possible explanation for this is that the first two emoticons are more versatile, and their images can embellish multiple kinds of texts. Regardless, it is clear that this form of media is popular, and it thus contributes to the shared practice among the users.

The other most used form of media was the GIF image, some of which contained short texts. In total, there were 65 GIF images posted throughout the 100 pages in question. These images were almost always allusions to pop culture or other famous figures in United States culture. And, as expected, numerous GIFs were related to Lady Gaga herself. Of the 65 GIFs used, 33 did not contain text while 32 did. This is almost an even split, slightly favoring the absence of text (50.77%), but clearly not significant enough to declare that the forums prefer one style of GIF over another. I will further describe the underlying structure of GIF-posting during the humor portion of this ethnography. For now, it is enough to say that GIF images are a relatively common component of the communicative practice employed by GagaDaily members in this environment.

Within the first 100 pages of this Charts/Sales thread, there were 207 different *types* of linguistic/communicative phenomena that are characteristic of this online community. In total, there were 1,043 instances of these phenomena. Considering the data set was 100 pages of posts, we can say that, on average, there were nearly 11 (10.91) instances of communicative phenomena that are characteristic of GagaDaily within each page. To say they are prevalent is an understatement; they are quite unavoidable. In addition to demonstrating their high frequency, I have shown that these communicative phenomena are complex in usage, and are able to effectively express one's views of the charts in a code that the users all understand – a shared practice. Therefore, I have established that the *domain, community,* and *practice* are all present; thus, this *is* a community of practice.

SECTION 6: HUMOR AND LINGUISTICS

The second locus around which this paper is organized is the function of humor in this online community. Given the multifaceted and complex nature of such a focus, I have organized this section into a few main parts. First, I will examine the relationship between linguistics and humor - given that the majority of our humor is expressed through language, it stands to reason that something within the structure of language as a faculty does allow for humor to emerge. Second, I will briefly explore the first of the *tactics of intersubjectivity* (Bucholtz & Hall, p. 382) Third, I will explain DuBois's concept of the stance triangle. Finally, I will examine the role of gay culture(s) in providing some linguistic resources to create such humor. To start, we must appreciate the power of language as a vehicle of comedy.

There is no crevice in language into which humour cannot force a wedge. Our

jokes and witticisms can exploit the highest structural levels of language, from

discourse and genre conventions to narrative forms, down through sentence

structures, word-order conventions, agreement constraints, all the way down to

morphology, spelling, pronunciation and stress patterns. (Brône et al., 2015, p. 2)

In other words, humor can permeate all dimensions of language use, and thus we

should be looking for it at all structural levels within authentic texts. Given the

undeniable reality of language change, it would follow that humor can shapeshift with the

times. This makes sense when we call to mind all the numerous ways that novel linguistic

structures can give rise to hilarious results. Thus, as languages change and evolve (and,

naturally, as cultures do the same), humor takes new shapes, which allows for the "birth"

of quality jokes. With these understandings, we can see a clear relationship between

language and humor. With the exception of humor in other modes (such as slapstick

humor or musical humor), language acts as the landscape throughout which humor will

inevitably blossom.

Up until now, I have not concretely defined what I mean by humor. Much like the

concept of a community, it just seems to be something that everyone knows when they

witness it. Most online definitions of the term either point to other, semantically related

words ("comical" or "amusing"), or to something that causes laughter, a physiological

response. However, nearly everyone can recall having laughed despite not having

appreciated the intended humor; thus, the often associated human response is not

necessarily bound to the concept. It is worth noting, too, that the act of laughing to "fit

in" often implies an understanding that humor was intended. I posit, then, that to understand humor, we must see what it *does*, instead of worrying about what it *is*.

One way that humor can function is through a dichotomy introduced by Bucholtz & Hall as part of their *tactics of intersubjectivity* – adequation versus distinction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 382). The first, adequation, is defined in their words as follows:

> The term adequation denotes both equation and adequacy; the relation thus establishes sufficient sameness between individuals or groups. The relation of adequation suggests that likeness, which as discussed above is often taken to be the basis of identity, is not an objective and permanent state but a motivated social achievement that may have temporary or long-term effects. (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 382)

In other words, humor can be used as a means of marking similarity among online interlocutors on GagaDaily. Distinction is quite the opposite – it refers to the use of linguistic and communicative resources to mark difference (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 383). We will see how this dichotomy is utilized in several humorous examples from the data. Next, we must explore the *stance triangle*, an abstract positional concept relating interlocutors to the subject they are discussing. The three nodes (vertices) of the triangle correspond to the two subjects (interlocutors) and the object of their discussion; the lines represent communicative stances from one node to another (DuBois, 2007, p. 163). In his model, by means of evaluating and position oneself in relation to the stance object, the subjects are also aligned relative to each other (DuBois, 2007, p. 164).

As I stated in the previous section, it is impossible to deny the impact that gay language use and culture has had on the forums. Therefore, it would be helpful to be aware of some linguistic and phenomena that are typically tied to gay male culture(s) because they *do* appear on GagaDaily. Alongside numerous other constructions, these elements serve as the "tools" or "building blocks" of humor. Before going further, though, I must address two issues related to this field of study. First of all, the idea of a uniform gay subculture is simply inaccurate; there is a great deal of heterogeneity among those who identify as homosexual, and various subcultures exist in a hierarchical relationship to the abstract concept of "gay culture" (Barrett, 2017, p. 1). Unfortunately, considering the online nature of the group to be studied, it is hard to identify a subculture to which these speakers belong; therefore, I will take a broad approach to discussing these linguistic phenomena. I will focus on the queer linguistic phenomena that relate to the forums, most of which can be commonly understood among various subcultures.

Another caveat to this line of research is the issue of *authenticity*. It is well-known among scholars in queer studies that a great deal of "slang" that is used by queer subcultures started specifically among black gay men. These linguistic phenomena have since been adopted by gay subcultures at large. In fact, as Barrett states, "Gay male and lesbian language use largely involves the appropriation of language associated with other groups, and the way in which appropriated forms are combined can enlighten local LGBT ideologies of gender and sexuality" (Barrett, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, authenticity is regularly contested in the discourse itself, not something that exists abstractly or concretely in addition to the speech/writing (Barrett, 2017, p. 9).

While numerous linguistic phenomena with indexical ties to gay male identities are routinely used on GagaDaily, I want to focus on three that might be unfamiliar to most readers. The first is the lexical inclusion of - and wordplay surrounding - wigs, especially the "snatching" of wigs. Truthfully, there are a number of different ways that wig-snatching is used linguistically, but for our purposes, we will focus on the one most often seen on GagaDaily. When a pop diva does something so fantastic that a fan is filled with joy, then the fan's "wig" has been "snatched." *UrbanDictionary.com* corroborates this definition, stating that "wig snatching" is "a term used mainly by gay men and women to express extreme happiness or excitement when their diva has done something amazing, shocking, or gives life by any means" (Wig Snatching). There are numerous syntactic constructions that can be used to play with this joke, and it can even be hyperbolized (the fan is "scalped"), making it a versatile tool for creating a humorous effect.

The second element of their linguistic repertoire to be discussed is similar in that it involves the semantic transfer of an everyday concept - *tea*. Most constructions that reference *the tea* involve *spilling* said *tea*. In many instances, language play involving *tea* deals with secrets; for example, to *serve up tea* means to "gossip/share the scandalous secrets of a non-present drag queen" (Barrett, 2017, 64). This term has undergone semantic change in the past few decades, and, while it still carries the first meaning, it is often used to represent "truth." Thus, when someone on the forums "spills some hot tea," they could be making a profoundly truthful statement (Spill the Tea). The "heat" of the tea refers to how juicy the gossip is or how unequivocally true the message is; the hotter the better.

One final linguistic phenomenon is the use of feminine pronouns and terms of address regardless of the user's actual or perceived gender identity. For example, a post could begin with "All right, girls…" or a user could refer to another user as "sis." Although some scholars would argue that this is misogynistic in that it parodies women, Kulick disagrees, proposing that, in reality, it pokes fun at the very concept of gender, especially its lack of naturalness (Kulick, 2000, p. 254). In my own experience, I have rarely seen users take offense at the practice; more often than not, members of GagaDaily make use of this linguistic phenomenon and are accustomed to it.

SECTION 7: THE FUNCTION OF HUMOR IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

My second major claim is that humor, which, for our purposes, emerges purely linguistically, serves several social functions on GagaDaily, and that, by virtue of mediating and maintaining the social atmosphere of forums, it constitutes a key part of the *practice* element of the community of practice concept. I will carry out this mostly qualitative analysis by providing and explaining numerous examples that illustrate the adequation/distinction dichotomy on the forums as well as the use of many GIFs to illustrate stance on the forums. I will then tie these concepts back to the first major claim by arguing that being funny or witty in one's posts *is* part of the shared practice of these forums. This section is organized into two main parts: Meyer's Social Functions, and Humor as Practice.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND STANCE

As previously stated, adequation refers to the use of language to emphasize what the interlocutors have in common, thus diminishing their social distance from each other. If we picture the humorist and audience as having a conversation, then the connection becomes clear. This conversational model of humor is applicable if we consider that laughter, or lack thereof, *does* send a message; likewise, acknowledgement of a good joke on GagaDaily, even if it is just through an emoticon, is one way this can occur on the internet. I have assembled examples of humorous adequation from the data set as proof of the presence of this first function of humor.

First of all, I posit that one way in which GagaDaily members incorporate adequation is through widespread use of allusions to pop culture, of which Lady Gaga allusions are a subset. An allusion is a reference to something outside of the text itself, usually an iconic thing from pop culture. As a literacy device, an allusion can be effective when employed successfully, but, if, for example, the audience does not recognize the reference, then the joke might not work. Therefore, an understanding that both parties (and however many observers) will be aware of the reference is key to using a good and/or humorous allusion. In a sense, the parties are able to identify with each other by means of shared topic or interest; this means that the interlocutors are reinforcing their mutual appreciation or knowledge of the reference and acknowledge that they have this cultural concept in common.

As expected, one cultural phenomenon they have in common is Lady Gaga, and, as such, she is the reference for a number of allusions. For example, one user references the chorus of Gaga's 2013 hit "Applause" by saying "Give me the +1M updates that I

love." (The original track states, "Give me the thing that I love.") (Germanotta & Blair, 2013). In this allusion, the user expresses that they wish to see a high increase in Gaga's daily radio listeners, and, on a humorous level, referencing a song that Gaga fans will undoubtedly recognize. The user is drawing on a shared knowledge base, and in turn, displaying they belong as part of this community. Another Gaga-related allusion occurred on page – "The Joanne Monster." This is stated in reference to Lady Gaga's 2009 re-release of her 2008 debut album, *The Fame*, which she aptly titled *The Fame Monster*. The user is suggesting that Gaga could give *Joanne* a sales boost by re-releasing the album. However, the user never outright says this, only contributing "The Joanne Monster." Again, the contextual information is common knowledge among Gaga fans, thus showing their shared interest. One final allusion to Gaga, carried out in a light-hearted yet mocking way, appears on page in the form of a GIF. In the image, Gaga looks at a man above her left shoulder and says "I'm Italian." Among fans, Gaga is known for repeatedly, and sometimes incessantly, acknowledging her Italian ancestry, and they love to make fun of her for this sometimes strange behavior. This GIF is an example of that, showing not just a shared *knowledge* of Lady Gaga's odd quirks, but also a shared *evaluation* of this quirk as funny.

Many other allusions reference a wide variety of topics, and they are employed in a humorous way. For example, on pages 51 and 85, the users reference a line in Lorde's 2016 song "Green Light": "That green light, I want it." As pop music fans, they do follow more artists than just Gaga, and Lorde is definitely competition for her. Thus, it is to be expected that most members have heard this song. Some of the allusions mark ties with the gay community specifically, especially the ones that reference the hit TV series

RuPaul's Drag Race, which occurs on pages 3 and 31. Again, while we cannot assume the sexual orientations of all these members, this at least suggests an awareness of hallmark cultural icons in the gay community, and if members do not have their sexuality in common, they at least share that understanding. Finally, on page 13, a user refers to a previous comment as "Fake news," a term popularized through Donald Trump's presidency. Though this undoubtedly serves other functions, it also helps ground the discussion in the global culture of today. Regardless of their beliefs, all members of GagaDaily are present in the world of today, and that world includes the political rise and power of Donald Trump. Thus, this user is drawing on shared knowledge of the world we live in, a world in which the president refers to the free press as liars.

Another way that adequation plays out on GagaDaily is through the use of female terms of address, and potentially flouting that trend in a hilarious manner. Other members, outside people, and even inanimate objects (such as songs or albums) can be the referent of these female terms of address. In total, there were 29 instances of a user referring to someone or something using female terms of address. The most common was "sis" (an abbreviation of sister), which occurred 17 times. A variation of this, the phrase "good sis," occurred 5 times, and often had inanimate referents. For example, one user referenced the song "Million Reasons," calling it the "good sis MR." Inclusion of this phrase before a noun phrase displays a love and appreciation for that noun phrase. In this instance, the user is praising the commercial success of "Million Reasons." It is clear that using these feminine terms of address helps demonstrate identification because everyone receives the same types of terms of address. In a sense, it removes gender distinction as a potential cause of social distance among members.

Distinction, the opposite of adequation, seeks to highlight differences among interlocutors. Humor, when carrying out this role, is intended to create social distance between the humorist and the topic at hand, which may or may not be the audience. Though not really employed towards other members, it is usually used by members in reference to some outside entity (other fan bases, other artists, other songs, etc.) to mark difference from that other group and alignment/allegiance among the other users, thus creating an in-group/out-group situation. This function of humor is employed primarily towards other artists and their fan bases, and it is the realm in which we find most instances of shade. In the "Humor as Practice" section of the ethnography, we will see this being employed (alongside evaluative stance) to mediate a disagreement among members.

The first example, though, is the prevalence of shade towards artists who have insulted Lady Gaga. For example, electronic music duo The Chainsmokers had at one point said that Lady Gaga's "Perfect Illusion" was a bad song. Since then, there has been a great deal of vitriol towards The Chainsmokers due to their dissing Gaga. For example, on page 51, they are referred to as "The Trashsmokers." The second example is the regular, mild shade towards Katy Perry and her fans. She is rarely referred to by her stage name, but instead Katheryn, (which occurs in my data on page 32). One final example occurs on page 32 by means of a GIF following the A+B format. The text says "Drake who?" This is a reference to a mean statement made by Madonna about Lady Gaga in which she said "Lady who?" Following the insult towards Drake, there is a GIF of Mariah Carey smiling and saying "I don't know her."

To understand the use of GIF images, I have chosen to frame them as a means of emphasizing and reinforcing stance alignment and stance taking. We can see through the humor where the humorist stands in regards to the concept in question. This occurs frequently on GagaDaily through the use of GIFs and other media. For our purposes, we will contain our discussion to GIFs. Previously, I had divided the 65 GIFs as either images with text (32) or images without (33). Another helpful way to categorize these media is through the *structure from which it emerges*. Instead of what it looks like, we are investigating how the GIFs are used.

Two formats were used in regards to GIF insertion, and both deal with the presence or absence of text accompanying the GIF directly. When there is text before the GIF, the GIF is used to elaborate upon, illustrate, or intensify the text preceding it. It follows a structure of "A+B." Part A is the (usually) textual introduction which provides all necessary context to understand the GIF. It functions, thus, as the "set up." Part B is the GIF illustration or elaboration. This is a visual representation of what the speaker was referencing in Part A; in effect, it is the "punchline." It is important to remember that, in this structure, both A and B are provided by the same user in the same post. In a sense, Part A provides the introduction to the concept presented, and Part B clarifies it through visual imagery. Through the structure of this joke, we see the user's stance on the issue at hand, at is usually done in a humorous manner.

The first example (Figure 8) I have extracted is presented to make light of the constant bickering among Gaga fans as to what should be the next single.

Figure 8, GIF Example 1.

We can see the A+B format being executed here. There is a line of text "Bored Monsters looking for the 3rd single" and an image following that illustrates what the text is saying. The image shows Nicki Minaj wearing large sunglasses with her hand above her forehead as though she is searching for something. Neither one of these elements make complete sense on their own, but their juxtaposition allows for a humorous effect. The user is creating an evaluative stance in regards to fans who continue to argue about the future of Gaga's career; the user is clearly unamused by this behavior, yet turns it into something quite amusing. I have provided more screenshots (Figure 9) that illustrate the same structure:
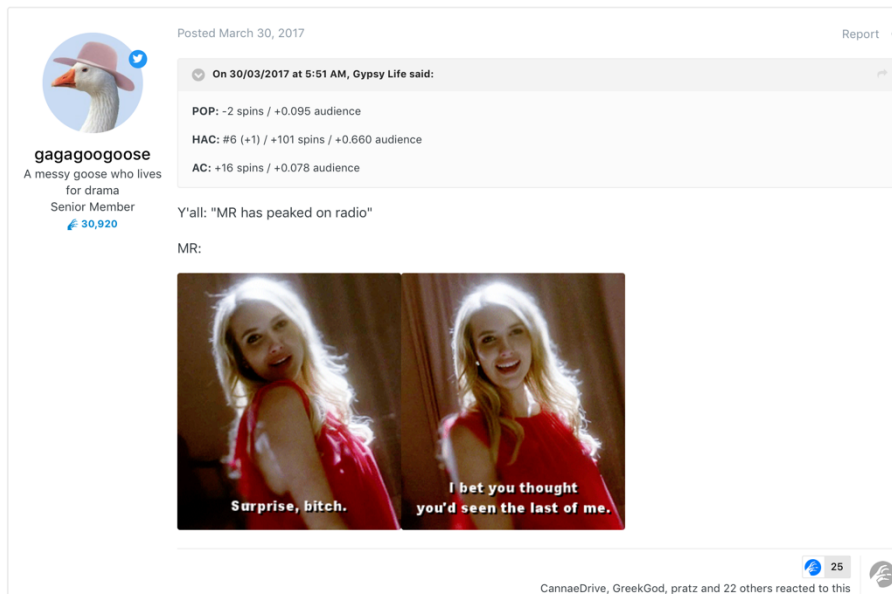
Figure 9, GIF Example 2

There are a few things to note in this screenshot. First, it does follow the same A+B format that I had introduced. Second, as is typical, the GIF is an allusion to a pop culture topic. The GIF in question references an iconic scene in the third season of *American Horror Story*, titled *Coven*, in which the lady in the image (portrayed by Emma Roberts) has been resurrected and seeks to taunt her killer. The user is personifying "Million Reasons" by having it "announce" its resurrection on the radio. Finally, notice that, in the bottom-right corner of the post, there is a blue monster paw and the number 25. This indicates that 25 users "liked" this post. Thus, it clearly resounded with the members of the group as humorous while simultaneously *illustrating* and *elaborating* the continued success of "Million Reasons." In effect, though, the user is displaying their position towards this by treating it with such levity. If this were not a point of celebration, a more serious or somber tone would have been warranted.

A similar sentiment is expressed in the next post (Figure 10), which again seeks to make fun of the longevity that "Million Reasons" had. In this instance, the A+B structure is employed twice to express, basically, the same feeling – shock. In this instance, the stancetaker (the user) is revealing an affective stance (surprise) but also illustrating/reinforcing their positive evaluation towards the success of Million Reasons.
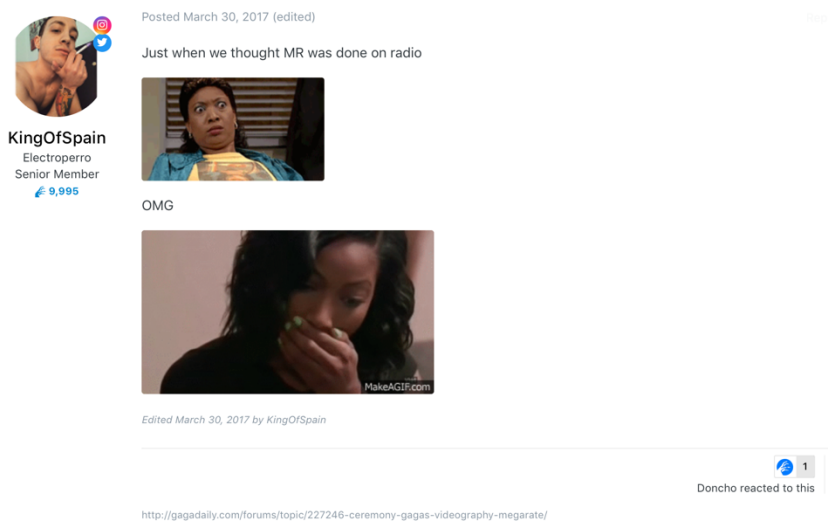
Figure 10, GIF Example 3

Another format in which GIF use occurs is as a response in and of itself. In this structure, we see an A/B model in which part A is some previous post (using the quote feature) and part B is the response of the current user. Unlike the self-elaboration structure, this one emphasizes that the two parts must be provided by different people. It occurs at the conversational level. This could be considered a type of internet-mediated adjacency pair. The first pair part is any type of statement, and the second pair part is a GIF-mediated response that illustrates what User B thinks of the statement. Part B helps

50

to index an evaluative stance that also reflects alignment (or misalignment) with User A with respect to the Stance Object, thus creating the stance triangle.

As an example, consider the following two screenshots (Figures 11 and 12) which, together, comprise an entire post. The user quotes numerous other users who are advocating for "A-Yo" as the third single – all of these together constitute part A. Then, the user's only response is a GIF of Donald Trump saying "Wrong" into a microphone at a debate. This has the effect of clarifying where the user stands on the topic of promoting "A-Yo" as the third single; they clearly do not support this idea. In this instance, multiple dimensions/lines are necessary to fully illustrate the alignment factor. The user's single response of Donald Trump saying "wrong" is not only showing their evaluation of the topics that have been presented, but also aligning them with respect to *multiple* interlocutors, a phenomena that is more feasible in an online setting as opposed to a face-to-face conversation.
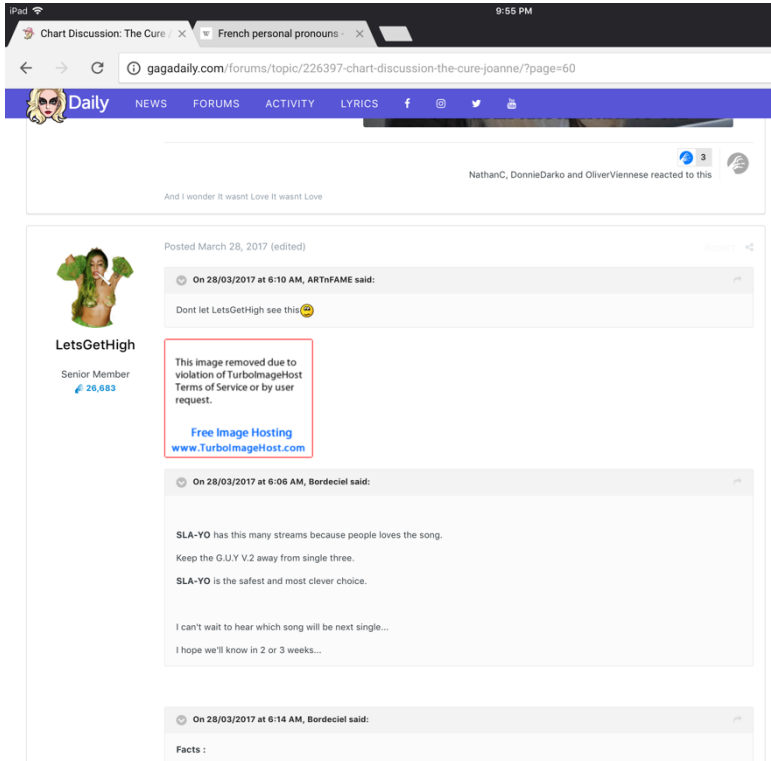
Figure 11, Response Example 1 Part 1
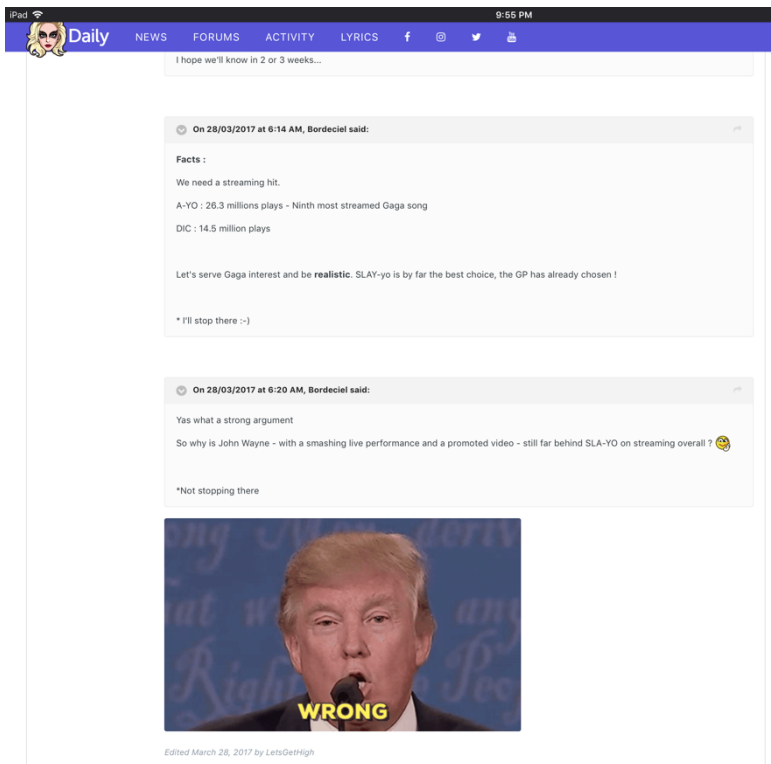
Figure 12, Response Example 1 Part 2

The next example (Figure 13) is also the user's response to an assertion that they did not like. The previous user had suggested two specific album tracks as the follow up singles, and the current user found the concept so revolting that they simply replied with a GIF of Lady Gaga vomiting during one of her concert tours.
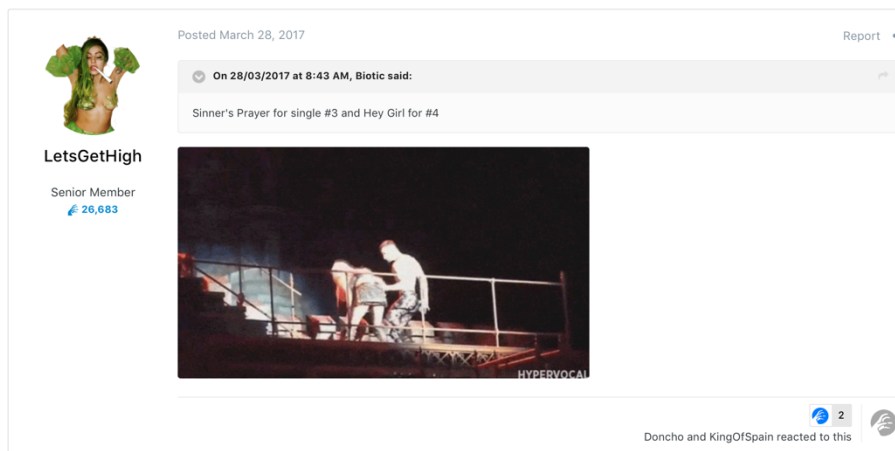
Figure 13, Response Example 2

Although there are potentially numerous sources of stance alignment to be found, one fruitful source was animated GIF images. Through these images, the users are able to illustrate, in a humorous fashion, how they feel towards a certain idea.

HUMOR AS PRACTICE

This section is the culminating moment of the ethnography in which the previously explored ideas are synthesized and shown in action through a series of five posts. I have included them below followed by a post-by-post analysis of the conversation.

Daily   NEWS   FORUMS   ACTIVITY   LYRICS   f   ◎   ✔   ▶

Bordeciel
Sla-yo
Senior Member
✎ 133

On 28/03/2017 at 6:10 AM, ARTnFAME said:

Yas bitch serve the facts

Facts :

We need a streaming hit.

A-YO : 26.3 millions plays - Ninth most streamed Gaga song

DIC : 14.5 million plays

Let's serve Gaga interest and be **realistic**. SLAY-yo is by far the best choice, the GP has already chosen !

* I'll stop there :-)

GagaMyBlood95
◂ Diamond Heart ◂
Senior Member
✎ 8,856

Posted March 28, 2017

On 28/03/2017 at 6:14 AM, Bordeciel said:

Facts :
We need a streaming hit.
A-YO : 26.3 millions plays - Ninth most streamed Gaga song
DIC : 14.5 million plays

Let's serve Gaga interest and be **realistic**. SLAY-yo is by far the best choice, the GP has already chosen !

* I'll stop there :-)

DIC is the highest streamed non-performed song from Joanne. I think you gave all the arguments yourself though 😋

Figure 14, Conversation Part 1

* I'll stop there :-)

DIC is the highest streamed non-performed song from Joanne. I think you gave all the arguments yourself though 😊

6

Bokhee, Naor Daniel, Drin Lon and 3 others reacted to this

Posted March 28, 2017   Report ⤴

> On 28/03/2017 at 6:17 AM, GagaMyBlood95 said:
>
> DIC is the highest streamed non-performed song from Joanne. I think you gave all the arguments yourself though 😊

Bordeciel
Sla-yo
Senior Member
✏ 133

Yas what a strong argument

So why is John Wayne - with a smashing live performance and a promoted video - still far behind SLA-YO on streaming overall ? 😊

*Not stopping there

1

DonnieDarko reacted to this

Figure 15, Conversation Part 2

Posted March 28, 2017   Report ⤴

> On 28/03/2017 at 6:20 AM, Bordeciel said:
>
> Yas what a strong argument
>
> So why is John Wayne - with a smashing live performance and a promoted video - still far behind SLA-YO on streaming overall ? 😊
>
> *Not stopping there

GagaMyBlood95
◄ Diamond Heart ►
Senior Member
✏ 8,856

Because A-Yo was literally released weeks before John Wayne, performed multiple times (John Wayne only has one performance) and had the advantage of an Audio on YouTube since its release. Also, it was getting single treatment before MR was released.

Omg I can't believe this discussion is on again 🙈 Gaga please announce the third single so we can all stop (including myself lol)

6

FrankGutz, Bordeciel, ARTnFAME and 3 others reacted to this

Posted March 28, 2017   Report ⤴

> On 28/03/2017 at 6:17 AM, GagaMyBlood95 said:
>
> DIC is the highest streamed non-performed song from Joanne. I think you gave all the arguments yourself though 😊

DonnieDarko
Senior Member
✏ 3,909

Irrelevant. Having a bunch of twinkies listening on Spotify is not a reason to make Dancin in Career Ending a single.

I love the song. It's just soooo not a follow up to that radio slayage of MR. It would kill any kind of momentum MR gained.

Figure 16, Conversation Part 3

The previous three screenshots (Figures 14-16) provide the text for one final example that we can better understand through a close reading of a series of posts. This extended example contains numerous communicative phenomena that we have seen, and they are mainly used to execute some of the functions of humor. The users are debating what should be the 3rd single off of *Joanne*: "A-Yo" or "Dancing in Circles." All through these posts, it is important to recognize that each user is taking a stance towards the single choice and simultaneously aligning themselves against other users who may or may not agree – the stance triangle. I have selected five posts that appeared in sequence, and I have presented them in chronological order. User A posts first – P1, then User B responds – P2. User A responds to that – P3, and User B responds again – P4. Finally, User C appears and responds to P3, thus becoming P5.

P1. Within the first post, we see two examples of the omnipresent acronym usage: DIC and GP. Additionally, the user refers to "A-Yo" as "Slay-Yo." It is clear that this member believes that "A-Yo" should be the third single, given its higher streams on Spotify as compared to Dancing in Circles.

P2. User B corrects User A's evaluation. Again, DIC is employed, and then an emoticon is used at the end – a smiley face that appears to be giggling. In effect, User B is laughing at the perceived truthfulness of their previous statement, that User A had given "all the arguments." This post incorporates distinction by creating social distance between Users A and B. User B is highlighting an important difference here: they disagree on what should be the next single.

P3. User A questions the veracity of P2, yet begins by insulting the cogency of P2. This is done sarcastically, first by employing "Yas" with no orthographic indication of excitement (which would normally accompany a "Yas."), second by putting the unenthusiastic "Yas" before the ironic statement "what a strong argument." After this shade is thrown, User A brings forth new information that could supposedly raise concerns about the truth of P2. User A ends with the same emoticon employed by User B in a mocking fashion. This post builds on the distinction employed in the previous post. User A is trying to shade User B in retaliation for the initial shade.

P4. User B defends P2 by giving a supposedly satisfactory answer for P3's questioning. In addition to using the acronym MR, P4 incorporates the previously mentioned gravestone emoticon, indicating that the user has "died from laughter." This post ends with User B lamenting that there has been no third single announced and wishing that the fans would quit obsessing over it (including themselves). This bit of self-deprecating humor is a clear example of adequation because it shows how they are all committing this annoying act; this is a quality they share. It is also worth noting that User A actually "liked" this post, indicating that the "ceasefire" was accepted.

P5. User C appears and quotes P3. The user asserts that Dancing in Circles is not the appropriate choice for the next single, even though they personally love the song. Because of this self-professed love, it is reasonable to assume that distinction is not the goal here, even though the post begins with the rather harsh statement, "Irrelevant." Evaluative stance seems to be the most relevant function here – User C is more interested in incorporating humor (such as the phrase "Dancing in Career Ending") to clarify how they feel on the issue.

It is also important to recognize the overall structure of this discourse. The users are essentially "forced" into turn-taking, and there is no guarantee that their respondent will be who they expected. This allows for *branched turn-taking*. In this instance, an adjacency pair may have multiple first pair parts leading into a single second pair part (using the quote feature). The reverse is true, as well, as we see in our example. P4 and P5 are both second pair parts in relation to P3. Because of this, it is worthwhile to consider a *webbed* model of mapping conversations, even though the conversations are carried out in chronological order.

Through this analysis of a 5 post discussion, we can see that underlying humor permeates much of the discourse in the charts thread. Likewise, the various linguistic/communicative elements are the "tools" that are used to execute a great deal of this humor. Together, they form an important part of the shared practice of this community – the generally understood and accepted "ways of doing things." In other words, humor is simply how the users of GagaDaily perform the tasks surrounding their domain – Lady Gaga.

SECTION 8: DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

Having shown that GagaDaily constitutes a community of practice, and that humor serves numerous important social roles on the forums (including constituting part of the practice), I want to expand the scope of the discussion into larger theoretical implications that arise. I have found three overarching implications from this research - three concepts or ideas that the data and analysis seem to suggest. First, humor plays an active role in maintaining communities. Second, communities of practice allow for novel

language use to emerge. Finally, online interactions can build community to an extent, despite the common belief that internet communication is meaningless.

First of all, we must discuss humor and its importance for sustaining a community of practice. As seen through the above examples, humor-infused posts are common on GagaDaily, and they are especially effective at creating a fun atmosphere. Truthfully, this implication is the most obvious of them all; you would be hard-pressed to find someone who would rather *not* enjoy their time with those with whom they interact regularly. Tight-knit groups and less intimate ones alike can benefit from humor for a number of reasons, but, most obviously, because it preserves levity. Considering the same group of people post on the charts thread, with the occasional outlier, it is reasonable to suspect that they might actually enjoy doing so. While it is perfectly plausible that they are just extremely invested in the charts, the high prevalence of tangential information, media, and humor suggest that they are also interested in experiencing the pop world together. As we can see, maintaining levity among group members makes carrying out group tasks (in our case, sharing and analyzing chart information) more fun; this likely explains why the charts thread is always among the most active on the forums at all times.

Perhaps the most important implication to come from this study lies in the apparent value of the community of practice as a "location" for the usage of characteristic linguistic phenomena – a context in which a linguistic repertoire can grow. This project suggests that communities themselves, not just larger sociological categories like race and gender, are potential realms in which novel language use can occur, distinguishing the group from other collections of people. Variationist literature for decades has incorporated important contextual information from sociological categories and

paradigms. Studies that investigate the intersection of race (or any sociological category) and language use are quite simple to find, and are, of course, extremely valuable in the field. Research focusing directly on certain social groups and aggregates have also taken sociological categories into account; Labov's work on the "Fourth floor," of course, was strongly tied to issues of social class and social mobility (Labov, 1966). However, it is also worthwhile to understand how and why other formations of people develop endemic ways of speaking, especially communities of practice.

The idea that a social group would develop its own ways of speaking should not be surprising in the least. First of all, of the social configurations we have discussed (community and category), it is clearly the one that allows for more intimate bonds among its members. In terms of social networks, for instance, the connections among individuals are both dense and multiplex - the relationships are far stronger than those of a category or aggregate, and there are far fewer degrees of separation. Second, the definition itself limits communities to entities that have shared norms; these can certainly manifest in physical behaviors, expressions, and actions, but they also appear in language use. Shared ways of speaking should, therefore, emerge as well. Finally, as we have seen, humor helps build a positive atmosphere and develops cohesion. Likewise, humor is most often expressed *through* language use, specifically. Thus, it is only fitting that shared linguistic humor would surface, and this is often seen in high school cliques in the form of running jokes.

Building on the previous implication(s), the final point of interest focuses on the virtual aspect of the situation: communities can develop online, and, through textual/graphic format, shared ways of communication can develop as well. In other

words, the project suggests that online interactions can indeed be meaningful and productive. While I would never suggest it is a total alternative to human-to-human interaction, I do assert that virtual communication does allow for bonds to form and develop. The strength and nature of these bonds, though, is a far more nebulous topic. Through my research, we see that the power of the shared interaction in our community is strong enough for endemic linguistic phenomena. Little else can be extrapolated, however.

SECTION 9: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In an ideal academic scenario, certain barriers that hinder the most thorough analyses are removed; for example, with more time and more sophisticated methods, it would be possible to draw even more certain conclusions. In the current section, I intend to enumerate all the ways I would do the project differently, and I also plan to provide inspiration for potential new directions this research could take, in both the micro and the macro scales. I provide these thoughts not to undermine my own work, but to present it in the most honest frame. Through doing so, I believe that this ethnography becomes a useful springboard for further exploration.

The first and most obvious thing that I would do differently is to catalogue more entries. While 100 pages did provide me with 1500 entries to use, this number was an arbitrary line drawn merely to make this project more feasible within the time allotted. The thread from which I extracted my data had 1085 pages before it was closed, which means that there were a little under 16,275 entries that I could have catalogued. However, a one-thread limit itself is still arbitrary, especially when we consider that there are

numerous charts threads, most of which have been closed to prevent further posting. Each of these would contain around 1000 pages, thus giving an average of 15,000 possible entries per thread. Then, the next logical question would be: how many threads must be catalogued? Additionally, I could catalogue the current charts thread day-by-day as users post there, giving the most up-to-date linguistic phenomena because, as we know, languages and language use change over time. In short, it is not obvious exactly *how much* data is enough. What *is* clear as that my sample size only begins to scratch the surface on what I argue is a worthwhile avenue of study.

In addition to expanding the sample size, I would like to modify the criteria and scope of my cataloguing. Principally, I want to focus less on pure number of tokens and instead look for patterns in *type* of phenomena. In other words, instead of counting the total number of times that MR appeared, I would like to see in what contexts MR appeared. Or, perhaps, I could categorize the various acronyms into groups to see if any patterns emerge there. Finally, given the pervasiveness of allusion in this forum, I would like to form a study solely around this literary device – categorizing the allusions into respective linguistic groups to search for patterns.

Another way in which I could modify this study would be to include posts and threads from other sub-sections of GagaDaily. I chose the charts thread specifically in hopes that it would be rich with linguistic phenomena, and I was not disappointed. However, the community exists beyond this one sub-section, *and* the same linguistic phenomena are seen all across the forums. Therefore, there might be patterns that I am not seeing because I am only considering data from one sub-forum, thus depriving my discussion section of potential new implications or nuanced understandings of previous

ones. If I were to follow through with this course of action, I would definitely use data from the News subforum and the Gaga Thoughts subforum; both of these are strongly tied to Lady Gaga, thus maintaining the *domain* aspect of communities of practice. In other words, these two subforums would certainly contain novel data, but the data would still fall under the umbrella of relevance.

In addition to Lady Gaga, it would be worth investigating whether other pop forums operate in a similar manner, linguistically, and whether they can be classified as communities of practice. Gaga's peers, such as Katy Perry, Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Britney Spears, all have devoted fan bases who communicate online through discussion boards. One would of course have to consider the brands that each pop queen work embody alongside the demographics of the fans as a whole. One potential avenue would be to investigate if the race of the pop star in question has a correlation to the language used by their fans on pop forums. Likewise, one could investigate whether the artistic styles of these major pop stars relates to the language use. In short, it would be fair to assume a degree of similarity with GagaDaily, but there is most certainly room for distinction.

Another fruitful direction in which to take this flavor of research would be to move from the view of intra-fan-group to inter-fan-group. This project was primarily focused on how super fans of Lady Gaga manage to sustain group belonging through language use; however, this perspective is somewhat limited because it focuses solely on the operations of *one* group. Not only would it be interesting to study how fan groups interact with each other, it is also very feasible to do so. There is indeed another forum devoted to discussions of pop culture, especially pop music, known as ATRL

(http://atrl.net). This site features a wide variety of discussions, many of which are similar to the threads on GagaDaily, only the scope has been drastically widened. Fans of the most and least relevant pop stars (and everyone in between) congregate to debate whose "fave" is best, and, in a mildly pessimistic sense, to live vicariously through the rich and famous.

In fact, some people are members of both GagaDaily *and* ATRL, and they will post on the former to describe the degree of "messiness" seen on the latter. And the latter can be extremely messy from time to time, providing a plethora of entries containing fascinating linguistic phenomena as well as excellent shade. Numerous research questions arise in relation to inter-group dynamics among pop fans. For example, how do pop fans mark their allegiance to one star or another without explicitly saying so? How do the tactics of intersubjectivity illustrate various interpersonal interactions across fan boundaries? How do users talk about their idol versus how they talk about other artists? Through these questions, and many more, we could come to understand how electronically mediated discourse reflects and influences communication among different social groups.

SECTION 10: CONCLUSION

More often than not, critical analysis of pop culture topics is often seen as frivolous and wasteful of time and resources. It is not a "hard" science, so to speak. However, this ethnography pushes back at that notion, using carefully constructed methodology and theoretical frameworks to carry out an exploration of an online community. I have shown, through analysis of the domain, community, and practice that

this *is* a community of practice. Likewise, I have shown the importance of humor in mediating discussions on this forum. These main points of analysis have led to numerous implications and can foster even more fruitful exploration in the future. As the world becomes ever more dependent on technology to mediate our conversation, it is important that language studies recognize the effect that this mediation has for both the language itself and the speakers who employ it in their daily lives.

<div align="center">References</div>

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